

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001924

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS AND DS/IP/SA
NSC FOR DORMANDY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: VIOLENCE IN TRINCOMALEE ESCALATES

REF: A. COLOMBO 1920

[B](#). COLOMBO 1913

[C](#). COLOMBO 1897

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#). (C) Summary. In the wake of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)'s November 26-27 "Heroes' Day" celebrations, violence is escalating in Trincomalee. Tensions there are running high after two Sinhalese men were killed in a November 29 LTTE-called hartal (general shutdown), and numerous attacks on Sinhalese and Tamils. Security forces called a curfew November 29 and are expected to call another curfew November 30. President Kumaratunga ordered defense chiefs to meet in Trincomalee to discuss the situation and contain its escalation. Angered by the LTTE's Heroes' Day commemorations, many Sinhalese, fueled by the Marxist (and Sinhala Buddhist) Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), are protesting the LTTE-- and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) ceasefire monitors, whom the JVP believe favor the Tigers. The police and armed forces have done a great deal to contain the situation, but with two Sinhalese dead--and no Tamils--the upcoming funerals may well unleash continued unrest. At issue is whether or not the security forces can contain the violence in an already polarized setting. The AID/OTI office in Trincomalee is closed; personnel are safe and accounted for. End summary.

Heroes' Day Celebrations Anger Sinhalese

[2](#). (U) While much of the violence in the week-long run-up to the LTTE Heroes' Day celebrations (see Refelts) was between the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the unrest in equally-populated Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese Trincomalee was initially between the SLA and Sinhalese protesters angry about LTTE cease-fire agreement (CFA) violations. From November 24-30, the unrest escalated and is now primarily between Sinhalese and Tamil civilians, while the police and armed forces are attempting to maintain control over the violent situation by dispersing protesters, implementing curfews and increasing patrols in Trincomalee District.

[3](#). (C) The tension began to increase on November 24, when the Tamil Secretary to the North and East Governor was reportedly "detained" by the LTTE, and another Tamil member of the Governor's staff voluntarily turned himself over to the LTTE November 25. Earlier in November, the LTTE had approached these two staff members to request the cancellation of a November 26-27 Governor's conference in Trincomalee, but the Governor refused. After the staff members were "detained" in LTTE-controlled Sampur, across the harbor from Trincomalee town, the Governor canceled the conference. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) has not been able to visit the staff members, who are still being "held" by the LTTE, but on November 30 SLMM spokesman Oskar Solnes told poloff that they had been able to speak with their families.

[4](#). (C) On November 26, according to press reports and sources in Trincomalee, Sinhalese protesters, backed by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), demonstrated outside of the SLMM office in Trincomalee. Later that day, protesters raised the Sri Lankan flag to protest LTTE flag raisings (violations of the nearly three-year old CFA) and to honor a Sinhalese anti-colonial "hero." On November 26 and again on November 27, according to the SLMM's Solnes and other sources, police and SLA personnel reportedly used tear gas and fired guns into the air to disperse the crowd.

LTTE Call a Hartal

[5](#). (C) On November 29, the LTTE called a hartal, or general shutdown, in Trincomalee to protest a reported attack on pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP R. Sampanthan's son; however, some shops and public buses functioned normally. SLA spokesman Brigadier General Daya Ratnayake told poloff that Tamils attacked one such bus (carrying Sinhalese passengers), with a grenade. One Sinhalese man was

killed and three other Sinhalese men were injured. The police declared a curfew in Trincomalee District, during which, Ratnayake reported, several other attacks occurred: Tamils burned a van owned by a Sinhalese man; Sinhalese and Muslims burned a private bus owned by a Tamil; and other smaller skirmishes erupted between Sinhalese and Tamils in the area. Local media also reported that two houses were attacked by LTTE-backed groups. According to media reports and sources in Trincomalee, about 100 families were displaced from their homes because they did not feel safe. Sources in Trincomalee told poloff that relatively few Muslims have been involved in the unrest.

16. (C) On the morning of November 30, police lifted the curfew. SLA spokesman Ratnayake told poloff that the SLA was sending additional troops into the area from nearby Minneriya and noted that no security forces personnel had been injured in the unrest. Other sources in Trincomalee told poloff that the JVP was planning a retaliatory hartal, but called it off--and that police dispersed renewed skirmishes in downtown Trincomalee, reportedly beating both Sinhalese and Tamils. The SLMM's Solnes and SLA's Ratnayake confirmed to poloff the killing of a second Sinhalese man near Trincomalee on the Colombo-Trincomalee Road.

President Orders Defense Chiefs to Contain the Violence

17. (C) Meanwhile, President Kumaratunga ordered Eastern Security Forces Commander Nanda Mallawarachchi, Chief of Defense Staff Daya Sandagiri, and Commander of the SLA Shanta Kottegoda to meet in Trincomalee to discuss the situation with local police and Trincomalee SLA Commander P. Kulatunga. The SLA's Ratnayake told poloff that in the group's November 30 meeting, they discussed measures to prevent escalation of the conflict, what to do if the unrest spills into other areas, and how to control the situation should it worsen. SLA and SLMM sources expect the security forces to call another curfew November 30.

Funerals Could Provoke Further Unrest

18. (C) Angered by the LTTE's Heroes' Day commemorations, many Sinhalese are protesting in Trincomalee. The SLMM's Solnes noted that while it is impossible to know exactly who the Sinhalese protesters are, followers of a local Buddhist monk known for his strong Sinhala nationalist views (whom Solnes described as "one of the SLMM's best customers in Trinco") and members of the North East Sinhala Organization, a JVP-backed group, are involved. Trincomalee JVP MP Jayantha Wijesekara, in Colombo at Parliament, told political FSN that the LTTE was responsible for the violence in Trincomalee and that JVP protests were peaceful. SLMM's Solnes speculated that there is a strong possibility of continued violence in Trincomalee on December 1, the day of the funeral of the Sinhalese man killed in the grenade attack on a passenger bus November 29. He also noted that SLMM Chief General Trond Furuhoide may travel to Trincomalee to assess the situation.

Comment

19. (C) The unrest in Trincomalee is not surprising, given the LTTE's intransigent insistence on marking its Heroes' Day in grand style, and the JVP-fueled Sinhalese community's opposition to LTTE celebrations. JVP MP Wijesekara's disingenuous denials aside, much of the violence in Trincomalee stems from JVP hostility to the LTTE and to the SLMM, whom the JVP view as favoring the Tigers. The police and armed forces have done a great deal to contain the situation, but with two Sinhalese dead--and no Tamils--the upcoming funerals may well unleash continued unrest. At issue is whether or not the security forces can contain the violence in an already polarized setting. The AID/OTI office in Trincomalee is closed; personnel are safe and accounted for.

LUNSTEAD